

## CHAPTER

# No. 6



*“Please! No!” Maman begged.*

But the men insisted, “You cannot keep the girls isolated here. Those sick with the pox must go to hospital if we are to contain it.” They gathered Marie-Claire and Emilie in blankets, took them outside, and lifted them into the black wagon.

Huddled in the back, Marie-Claire closed her eyes. Terrified, she tried to pretend that the rough wagon was instead a fine carriage. It was not on its way to the smallpox hospital, but to a *soirée* at

one of the mansions on the hill. The bumps she felt on her hands were not pox but beaded gloves. Instead of thin blankets, she and Emilie were wrapped in furs. And the horses clip-clopping in front of them were not mangy workhorses but glossy stallions.

“Are we going to die?” Emilie whined.

Marie-Claire answered, “Did Cendrillon die going to the ball?”

“Cendrillon?”

“Imagine, Emilie, that you are Cendrillon. You are on your way to a party finer than any you have ever seen. In which of these fine houses do you think your prince lives?” Marie-Claire straightened the blanket around Emilie’s shoulders. “Mind your fur stole, *princesse*. Don’t let it catch in the wheels of your fine carriage.”

At the hospital, the putrid odour of smallpox filled the long room of beds. It was sweet and foul at the same time. From somewhere also came the stench of human waste. Marie-Claire covered her nose and mouth with her blanket, but it did not help.



“Where do we go to relieve ourselves?” she asked the nun who was showing them to their beds. Thankfully they were side by side.

The nun pointed to the end of the room.

The bucket of the commode was nearly full, but Marie-Claire had to use it.

Up and down both sides of the room, patients groaned and thrashed about in their beds. Nuns scurried from one bed to another with wet cloths, cups of water, and Bibles. Marie-Claire remembered what Lucille had said when she came out of hospital. *Can you imagine lying there and beside you in the next bed a girl has died? You call for the nuns to come, but . . .* Marie-Claire had been unable to imagine. Perhaps now she would not have to. So many patients. So few nuns—working as hard as they could, but always someone was in need.

“There’s something nasty on my sheet,” Emilie complained.

“I expect they haven’t time to clean bedding between patients,” Marie-Claire said. “Here, let’s

turn it over so you don't have to see that part."

"Can't we just share your bed?"

"I don't think so," Marie-Claire answered. "Not in a hospital."

But in the night Emilie crossed the small space between their beds to crawl in with Marie-Claire. In spite of how hot they felt, they held on to each other and tried to shut out the sounds of patients groaning and calling out, "Water! I need water!"

Once, after Emilie's breathing had grown regular, Marie-Claire heard a thump, as if someone had fallen out of bed. A moment later, she heard something being dragged across the floor. She looked up and realized what she had heard. It was not someone falling out of bed. A patient had died and been rolled off the bed in her sheet. Now her body was being taken to wherever bodies went before the cemetery.

Marie-Claire held her sleeping sister close. "Dear God, I do fear the ugly spots staying forever, but of me or Emilie dying I now have even more